

PROBLEMS OF SMALL AND MARGINAL FARMERS, WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO BARPETA DISTRICT, ASSAM

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Abstract

Agriculture and its allied activities play an important role in the socio-economic development in the state. Assam is basically an agrarian economy in the sense that about 69 per cent of the work force is employed in agriculture sector alone. In 2006-07, this sector contributed about 26 per cent to the Net State Domestic product of the state. The development of the state's economy is dependent to a large extent, on the development of this sector. But in spite of its overwhelming dominance in the state's economy the progress of agriculture in the state is far from satisfactory.

Increase in agricultural production in the economy can come about in two ways viz-through an increase in the land area under cultivation, way through more production utilization of land already under cultivation. The first source of agricultural growth, i.e. increase in the land area under cultivation may be important for country where population is sparse and cultivable land is available in abundance. But when the rapid growth of population the scope of bringing about more land surface under cultivation for increase in agricultural production by now, therefore, development must come primarily from more productive utilization of existing cultivated land area.

In Indians growing problems of poverty, the problems of small and marginal farmers and their solution are most important. The average size of holding too shows gradually decline from 1.69 hectares to 1.57 hectares over the period of 1985-86 to 1990-91. The heavy pressure of population on land in India, the situation in Assam is much more critical since this group comprises vast number of persons. The problems of improving their socio-economic condition is a challenge to the planners, policy makers and implementing agencies of development schemes.

Introduction

India has been known as an agricultural country. The economy of India is an agricultural based economy. Agriculture plays a crucial role in the economy development of the developing countries like India. It is considered as the backbone of Indian economy. In spite of rapid industrial development during the plan period, agriculture still occupies a pride place. Agriculture sector dominate the country's economy to such an extent that a large part of its national income comes from the agriculture sector.

The economy of Assam is predominantly agrarian. About 99 per cent area of the land mass of the State is rural and almost 50 per cent of the total area is used for cultivation. The net cultivated area of the State 28.10 lakh hectares (2008-09) and as per per capita availability of net shown area comes to around 0.1 hectare. On the top of it, 23 per cent of the net shown area is either flood or draught prone. The average operational holding is 1.15 hectare only and more than 83 per cent of the farmer family is small and marginal farmers (2005-06, Agricultural Census). The contribution of the agricultural sector to the GSDP (at constant 2004-05 price) was pegged at 4.1 per cent in 2009-10 (quick estimate) record showing a growth from 2005-06 but remained lower over 2008-09. However, this sector continues to support more than 75 per cent population of the State directly or indirectly providing employment of more than 53 per cent of the workforce.

The small and marginal farmers of Assam and North-East India did not receive adequate attention of the planners, administrators and even of the academicians till the end of the 3rd five year plan. This sector attracted attention only from the forth five year plan and a number of schemes were being undertaking by the Govt. for its upliftment . Despite the best effort of the planners the small and marginal farmers all over India particularly in North-East have to lead miserable life because of non-implementation of the schemes at the grass-root level of the department.

The weaker section in a country generally refers to the poor and the neglected categories of the population. Among the poor, the highest priority is accorded to the poorest of the poor are rural landless labours, small and marginal farmers, people belonged to scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, wage earners, agricultural labourers and village artisans.

Problems of the study:

In India's growing of poverty, the problems of small and marginal farmers and their solution are most important. The main problems of small and marginal farmers are:

1. Low level of agricultural productivity.
2. Low level of income.
3. Small size of land holdings.
4. Low level of adoption of Agricultural technology like HYV seeds, chemical fertilizer etc.
5. Uneconomic size of land holdings.
6. Orthodox methods of cultivation.
7. Lack of assured irrigation facilities and socio-economic factors like farmers conservative out look, and some other related factors.
8. Ignorance and illiteracy etc.

Agriculture in India is the occupation of 2/3rd of Indian population and contributes about 30 per cent of our GDP. But bulk of farming community is constitute by small and marginal farmers. According to 1990-91 Agricultural census, about 78 per cent of our land holding are below 2 hectares and 59 per cent is below 1 hectare. These two categories over 32.3 per cent and 14.9 per cent respectively. So, 3/4th of farmers are small and marginal farmers. In Assam , according to agricultural census 1995-96, there were about 26.8 lakh operational holding covered an area of 37.43 lakh hectare as compared with the figures of the earlier census of 1990-91. The number of operational holdings during 1995-96 were higher by 6.33 per cent and operated area decline by 2.07 per cent. The marginal holdings with less than one hectare of land accounted for 62.22 per cent of the total holdings and 19.80 per cent of the total operated area of the state in 1995-96.

The above facts indicates gravity of the situation and the heavy pressure of population on land in India. Situation in Assam is much more critical since this group comprises vast number of persons. The problems of improving their socio-economic condition is a challenge to the planners, policy makers and implementing agencies of development schemes. Detailed studies on the problems of small and marginal farmers are practically non-existent in the North-East India, though another parts of country, studies directly related to the problems of small and marginal farmers are found to be satisfactory. This calls for urgent necessity to conduct in-depth studies to find out the resources and other constraints encountered by this group of farmers in their socio-economic development.

The present study is based on both primary and secondary sources of data. For assessing the problems of small farmers of the state as a whole data from the secondary sources are used which are supplemented by personal observations and experiences in the field. Data from the primary sources relate to the erstwhile district of Barpeta of Assam. The particular district viz Barpeta in the lower middle Assam represents different agro-economic conditions. Barpeta district has multiple cropping pattern. It is supposed that the district would more pr less represent the socio-economic condition of the small and marginal farmers of the state.

For collecting required data village from the district are to be selected purposively based on certain criteria. The selected villages representing different region under rupshi dev. Block in the district. The study is expected to throw some light on the resources of the farmers and the problems faced by them in their socio-economic activities. It is also expected to explore ways and means for generating more income and employment facilities even with the existing resources.

In the present context on India's planning, majority of the population comprises small and marginal farmers. As such the socio-economic upliftment of this section of farming community is of vital importance for evolving appropriate plans and policy measures. Without improving the lots of small and marginal farmers, development of the country as a whole cannot be expected.

It is under such circumstances an effort is made to conduct an in-depth study entitled “ A Study on Socio-Economic Problems of Small and Marginal Farmer with special reference to Barpeta District, Assam.

Objectives of the study

The main objectives of the study are as follows:-

1. To study the resource endowment of the small and marginal farmers and their socio-economic background.
2. To identify the constraints faced by small and marginal farmers.
3. To study the possibilities of other subsidiary occupations for creating employment opportunities and also generating new source of income.
4. To study the potentialities of the existing farms and possibilities of increasing family income the existing farms.
5. To examine the impact of the small and marginal farmers development agency programmes on the small farmer based on secondary data.

Methodology of the study:

The study was conducted by using the procedure of survey method. In the present study data were collected from both primary and secondary sources.

For the first part of the study on the problems of the small and marginal farmers of the state as a whole. Secondary data will be used. These data will be collected from various publications of the state Government, central Government and various organization.

For the second part of the study primary data will be collected by the researcher through questionnaire, for this purpose the researcher will select certain villages considering some criteria's like having or not having irrigation facilities, village inhabited by scheduled cast people and the village of agriculturally prosperous area. A field investigation method will be carried out in two rounds. On the first round of survey, list of all household with their population and land holdings of selected villages will be prepared by personally visiting each household. In the second round of the survey, Personal interview method will be adopted to collect necessary information regarding the socio-economic status of the selected households.

Hypothesis of the study:

The hypothesis is a powerful tool in research process to achieve dependable knowledge. It helps the researcher to relate theory to observation and observation to theory. The word hypothesis is made up of two words, "hypo" and "thesis" which mean less or less certain than a thesis. Hypothesis are formulated only as the suggested solution to the problems, with the objective that the ensuing study may lead either to

its rejection or to its retention. They enable the researcher to locate and identify the variable involved in the study and suggest methodological procedures that are to be employed. They provide direction to the research and facilitate the extension of knowledge in an area. The hypothesis provide tentative explanations of facts and phenomena and can be tested and validated. In order to study the proposed problems we shall try to examine the following hypothesis.

1. Whether the uneconomic small holding affect the socio-economic status of the small and marginal farmers?
2. Whether low production and low income is responsible for the poor economic condition of small and marginal farmers?
3. Whether poor responses to agricultural practices is responsible for economic backgrounds of the small and marginal farmers?
4. Does the traditional farming is the causes of socio-economic background of the small and marginal farmers ?
5. Whether problems of tenancy and land reforms have any relation with the socio-economic Problems of the small and marginal farmers?

The study is proposed to be conducted on a representatives sample of population. For this purpose we will purposively selected a reasonable number of villages from the district. After determination of size and the way its selection we will proceed to collect data and analyses them to reach conclusion.

The data will be collected by personal canvassing of questionnaire among the small and marginal farmers. Land holders and the household of the villages, besides this we will be in need of some reports and records as already available in this head. For this we will personally visit different officers, commission, committee and the respective department.

The study will be conducted in two rounds, viz in the first round we will prepare a list of the household with all details and in the second round personal interview will be conducted for having information about the status of these household.

Conclusion

The findings of the present study revel that the problem of small and marginal farmer in this part of the country is more serious and complicated than what it is generally thought to be. The socio-economic condition prevailing in the sample households appear to be, by and large. Similar to those of small and marginal farmers of the plains districts of the state as a whole. The resources at the commend of this

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